

REMARKS*

by

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House of Representatives, U. S. Congress

I am both pleased and honored to be with you this afternoon. Of all our great universities, Harvard is the fountainhead. It was the first, and it has never abdicated its position of leadership.

Therefore, it is for me a matter of special significance that we are dedicating two buildings in this great university to research in environmental health and nutrition--two areas of study that are very close to the heart of the problems of modern man.

We have looked to Harvard for leadership many times in the past. And our expectations have always been fulfilled. Now we look to you to lead us out of a tangled present into the future. I know that we shall not look in vain.

The adventures of scientific, industrial man have been exciting and dramatic. But they have yielded a harvest of mixed blessings. We have shining skyscrapers--and slums. We have glorious expressways--and smog. We have millions of pleasure boats--and dead water.

I am confident that we can unmix these blessings--sort out the good from the ill--keep the benefits of our metropolitan, industrialized world and control the harmful by-products. But we haven't done it yet.

To do it, we need two things. First, we need more knowledge. Second, we need the courage and the determination to apply what we know, and what we learn.

This is why the concept of an environmental health research program here at the Harvard School of Public Health is so exciting to me. Here in the fine new building we dedicate today will be concentrated the advanced

*Dedication of Nutrition and Environmental Health Research Buildings,
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and sophisticated research tools and know-how needed to explore the complex relationships between man and his environment. This building will be a powerful generator of new knowledge.

And second, the location of this facility in an outstanding school of public health is the best guarantee that the knowledge generated here will not be allowed to collect dust on the shelves. It will go directly to those who, after studying here, will become the leaders of the public health movement of the future.

It has seemed to me, as a legislator with keen interest in the health of people, that public health workers have not been quick enough to tackle the challenge of the new environment. There have been many voices raised; but I have the impression that they have been, in large measure, crying in the wilderness. I think that, with a relatively few exceptions--most of them in very large cities--most of the service in environmental health has been lip-service.

I am well aware, of course, of the fact that most city and State health departments are under-budgeted, under-staffed and badly overworked. Most health officers are hard pressed merely to render the traditional services, much less seek new worlds to conquer.

Yet I am convinced that we need to strike a new balance in public health practice. The shining achievements of public health in the past half century are the upward sweep of the average lifespan in the United States and the downward plunge of mortality statistics for the communicable diseases. We can never know how many of us here today would not be among those present if these successes had not been won, or if they had been delayed by only a few years. Moreover, it is very clear that we cannot afford to relax our vigilance against these ancient enemies of man. The

disturbing story of the resurgence of venereal disease dramatizes this lesson for us.

But neither the continued presence of the enemy at the gates nor the burdens of trying to do too much with too little can justify neglect of the great health problems of today and tomorrow. Our new balance in public health practice must combine vigilance in communicable disease with greatly increased activity to combat chronic diseases and environmental hazards.

The assault of our man-made environment takes many forms. There is the chemical assault--new pollutants in the air we breathe and the water we drink, new chemical products in use on farms, in factories, everywhere around us. There is the physical assault on ionizing radiations from many sources. There is the generalized assault on our minds and nerves of speed, noise, crowded conditions, internal pressures.

I hope that the research program you design and carry out here will be as broad and diverse as the environment itself. And still more fervently I hope that the results of your work will be channeled swiftly and effectively into action. It would be the height of folly to create a shining, industrialized, nuclear-powered world for a human race whose health has been impaired in the process. It is up to the leaders in the field--and surely the Harvard School of Public Health will produce many of them--to keep this from happening.

But significant as environmental health is, it is no more vital to the future condition of man than the field of nutrition to which your other new building will be dedicated. Better diets and improved nutrition levels are undoubtedly among the major causes of our great national advance in health in this century. And the relationship of nutrition to the chronic diseases may well provide some of the great breakthroughs of the immediate future.

Today in the United States the diseases of nutritional deficiency have virtually disappeared. Pellagra and scurvy are almost unheard of. Children are growing more rapidly than ever before. Adults are taller and heavier.

True, we still have pockets of malnutrition in a very few limited geographic areas and among certain socio-economic groups. Undoubtedly diets could be further improved for some segments of our population. But the malnutrition which still persists can usually be traced to such circumstances as ignorance, poverty, misguided dieting or food faddism, or to such conditions as alcoholism. Certainly an abundance of nutritious food is available.

Yet there are many nutritional problems remaining, even here in the United States. Perhaps 20 percent of our adults are over-nourished--that is, obese. We have much to learn about desirable dietary patterns for our aging citizens.

Moreover, an exciting chain of evidence is now linking diet with our greatest health problem of all--heart disease. It has been found that the type and amount of fat in our diet affects blood cholesterol levels, which in turn are somehow related to coronary heart disease. The theory is not yet firmly proved. There are weak links in the chain of evidence. And much of this evidence is--in legal terms--guilt by association.

The final answers can come only through research in man himself, over a period of years. I am sure that projects such as this, striking at the root of the leading health problems of our time, will furnish much of the quiet drama in the laboratories of your new nutrition research building.

Farther, I know that those laboratories will perform important services, not just for our own country but for the world. I am aware of the long history of explorations in world nutrition problems conducted by Harvard and its distinguished staff. I know that students come here from every continent, to learn and carry back to their own people the latest developments in nutrition research. I know that Harvard scientists have studied dietary problems at first hand in many of the developing nations.

And I know, as do all of you, that there is no stronger bridge to international understanding than the mutual labor of trained minds, focusing their attention on the most fundamental problems of mankind.

I salute the Harvard School of Public Health for its distinguished past, and for its promising future. I am proud that the Federal government, through the Public Health Service, has been a partner with private philanthropy in the development of these new resources of health. And I join with you in looking forward to the changes in public health patterns which will have their genesis in these buildings we dedicate today--changes which will raise our level of health still higher in the years ahead.